

PERSPECTIVES

Friday

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STRIP AWAY your notion of diversity



SERENDIPITY'S WAND

SERENA MARKSTROM

Normally graduating Emerald staff members use this column to dispense self-indulgent "I'm a senior and you're not" advice. I was tempted to go that route, but there is something less fun, less perky, that I'm going to take this chance to address.

About a year ago, I attended a conference for minority journalists at the Irvine, Calif., Marriott. I walked down the hall with my roommate, Mariam, toward the ballroom, wearing my new dark green INC pantsuit, with an off-white sweater and my hair neatly clipped at the nape of my neck.

Actually, I may have been strutting a little. I had the right to. That morning I had five encouraging interviews with newspaper recruiters.

I was feeling good about my prospects. Indeed, the recruiter for the L.A. Times told me I had the "feature writer's touch" and introduced me to a program the paper has for young journalists, for which I am now a finalist.

Mariam also looked professional, wearing a gray skirt and jacket. We both carried notebooks containing our resumes and work samples.

Just before we reached the ballroom, a hotel patron stopped us.

Then it happened: He asked us if he could get extra towels and told us his room number.

The only thing uniform about us was our brown skin. Whatever bubble my new professional clothing and recruiter-generated encouragement had created popped for a second. We each gave him a nervous laugh, and I said, "We don't work here."

He must have felt stupid. He should have.

That was a stupid thing to say. Funny though, I doubt he's still thinking about the interaction.

Mariam, who is Latina, said this sort of thing happens a lot, so it barely bothers her. For me, it created a warm feeling around my heart. Just as a bruised area is hot when the blood below is trying to return to normal after a blow, my chest smoldered.

"That's so unfair," I thought, not wanting Mariam to know that it did bother me. I started to mentally list my accomplishments and remind myself that I perform well above most of my white peers. People give me awards and scholarships for being smart and full of potential. My brain was trying to fan the heat away from my heart.

There was no way around it: He was wrong, and I was hurt.

I wondered if there was anything I could have possibly said to have the same effect on him. I came up empty.

I've replayed this incident in my head many times and thought about it in relation to my experience at the University. The difference between this interaction and some of the ones on campus is that it happened in "the real world." Whatever the setting, these daily blows have been given a name in the diversity discourse: "paper cuts."

This paper cut wasn't malicious, but the concept of successful minorities was out of his immediate frame of reference. That's a shame, but a pervasive shame.

I have been involved with much of the dialogue surrounding diversity. I worked at the Multicultural Center for two years, and that experience helped shape how I would come to view the issue of diversity.

As it stands, I am the only minority student on the Emerald editorial staff who has participated with ethnic student groups. That unique perspective put me in an odd spot when I got the job at the Emerald. There have been times over the past year when I have marveled at some fellow staff members' lack of understanding of diversity.



Giovanni Salimena Emerald

I respect my fellow Emerald staffers. I think they are some of the smartest people I have met at the University. Just like most of the students in the unions don't know what it's like to be a reporter, the reporters don't know what it's like to be a minority at the University.

Many staff members and other students seem to want to oversimplify diversity and absolve themselves of any role in it. It has become a meaningless buzz word to many students, and they use it with spite, resentment and disgust. This is troublesome.

Why are people so threatened by the idea that others don't want to be on the margins? Why is it hard to see how any student, especially white ones, can help remove the psychological maid uniforms from minority women?

It'd be pessimistic for me to say that I don't have much hope for the average middle-class college student to understand this issue without full immersion, but that's what it took for me to understand it. I even studied in Mexico and learned how important being American is in shaping a privileged identity.

We all need to consider where we are from and how that affects how we see and treat others. I am from Eugene, and though my father is black, I was raised by my white mother and had little contact with my black rela-

tives. I have had to battle my own prejudices while here — including prejudices about the groups I belong to.

I understand this issue now because I made it a lifestyle to do so. I took for granted that I didn't know anything about anyone else and learned accordingly. The required eight multicultural credits are not enough for anyone to come out of the University with a sound understanding of this complicated issue.

Diversity is not just about having a black friend or going salsa dancing once in a while. It is the visceral knowledge that every other person has things just as important, if not more so, to contribute to this country. It's taking people in one at a time, so that even in the context of southern California — where most of the Hispanics are working class — you can avoid making ignorant statements and hurting other people.

This knowledge comes from repeatedly thinking about where your thoughts came from and questioning whether they are correct.

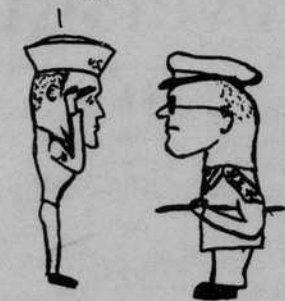
All I can ask of the rest of the students here is to take this time within a forced and unnaturally small community and use a different route now and again.

Pride yourself on being well-rounded, and
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Leftfield

Frank Silva

DON'T ASK



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 1/24/00

DON'T TELL



Elections must end

Election Haiku

For those who don't know haiku,
 It is Japanese.
 Written in three lines,
 This poetry is arranged
 By syllable count.
 The first line is five,
 The next line must run seven,
 The last, five again.
 Orthodox haiku
 Describes feelings of nature
 In a structured way.
 Our haiku's free form.
 But syllables are counted.
 We hope you enjoy.

...
 Jacobson and Cook,
 Nilda and Eric, the rest —
 No more grievances!

ConCourt meets tonight
 Will it make a decision?
 Not until Monday.

This is important
 It involves lots of money
 So why don't we care?

Maybe we're all bored
 With the endless re-voting.
 So get on with it.

Stop confusing us
 And stop the endless drama
 Let's vote already.

There's more confusion
 With these student elections
 Than in Florida.

Give us a break, please.
 Students have more important
 Things to be doing.

It's Dead Week, for one
 The elections brouhaha
 Just isn't pressing.

With finals next week,
 The court should just rule today
 And end our torture.

This haiku represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.